

26 February 2010

Legislative Assembly of the ACT
Standing Committee on Planning,
Public Works and Territory and Municipal Services
committees@parliament.act.gov.au

Attention: Ms. Mary Porter AM (Chair)

Dear Ms Porter,

SUBMISSION TO THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING, PUBLIC WORKS AND TERRITORY AND MUNICIPAL SERVICES

On the Inquiry Into RZ3 and RZ4 Residential Development Policies – Inner North Canberra

I wish to make a comment in my capacity as a practising architect with Masters Degree in Urban Design from Harvard University and as a Certified Practising Planner with the Planning Institute of Australia. My firm has had extensive experience in the design of projects on many of Canberra's avenues and are currently engaged with a number of projects with frontages to major avenues in the central area of Canberra.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to comment on this review of the Northbourne Avenue corridor which has major strategic implications for the entire central Canberra including the inner North and the inner South. These comments focus on the broader principles in relation to the issues rather than the finer details which I do not have sufficient time to go into for this submission. I would welcome the opportunity to make a full presentation to the Committee that would provide a higher level of detail about specific areas. I would also like to note that these are very complex issues that require well integrated responses.

Prior to making specific comments on the inner north precinct under review I have taken the liberty of placing this precinct in the wider context of the network of avenues and transport corridors throughout the entire central area. I believe there are too many site specific planning and a lack of strategic principles that could, and should, be applied to all areas of the City.

I strongly endorse the urban planning principle of higher density development along major transport corridors with the qualification that a number of policies be embraced within this principle, these are;

1. A land use policy that promotes mixed use

All Avenue frontages should have a mixed land use policy e.g. CZ5 as a consistent policy applied to the twenty plus avenues in the central area of Canberra (inner North and inner South). This is crucial for the integration of higher density development with major public transport corridors that provides opportunities for places to work and places and to live, and activation of the corridors.

These policies will only be effective with a city wide approach and application.

2. A review of Avenue design to accommodate different modes of transport including public transport, walking and cycling options

At present, whilst Northbourne Avenue is called an Avenue, the section between Antill St and Wakefield Avenue is essentially an expressway for cars rather than an Avenue or Boulevard as originally intended. This is evidenced by a length of over a kilometre in this section of the Avenue, without intersections. Opportunities abound between Antill Street and Wakefield Avenue to provide more regular crossroads that would have the potential to transform this expressway into what was originally intended to be a real avenue with an integrated boulevard design.

As an immediate priority I would recommend the extension of Cape Street in Dickson to form an intersection with Northbourne Avenue, making significant improvements to access between Lyneham and Dickson. These may appear to be bold ideas however there are a number of opportunities that exist for intersections to assist in managing traffic as well as promoting public access for the future.

Well designed boulevards and avenues have footpaths, cycle ways and parked cars as a buffer to the moving traffic, in that order. In contrast to this section of Northbourne Avenue; Wentworth Avenue, Northbourne Avenue in Civic and Brisbane Avenue all have regular intersections and cross streets, with roads with address to buildings, and active street fronts which are characteristics of boulevards and avenues.

If Canberra is serious about creating a real avenue, and increasing the density, there is a need for a clear policy on the cross sectional design and configuration of Northbourne Avenue, and some degree of consistent approach to the avenue design throughout the central area.

3. An appropriate parking policy to restrict parking provision while promoting public transport and alternative forms of transport

To promote walking trips, cycling and increased use of public transport on the avenue it is essential to implement a parking policy for new development that limits parking and promotes walking and the use of public transport by limiting commuter trips by car.

The evidence demonstrates that inner city housing that is convenient to work place and shops has a dramatically reduced level of car use for commuter trips. Avenue design needs to accommodate walking, cycling and public transport trips along the transport corridor.

4. A clear development strategy and consistent development policy for 100 metres back from the Avenue

The mixed use zone needs to extend to a line at least 100 metres back from Northbourne Avenue for all sites to allow for high quality of developments along the edges of these Avenue. This should apply to the zoning of all avenues and boulevards.

As an example there are two sites in Dickson that range in depth from 25 m to 40 m. These sites are totally inadequate to provide appropriate high quality redevelopment of the avenue frontage.

5. Other factors as listed under Item 4

As one adopts these policies as outlined above and the avenues of Canberra become active, working boulevards in the true sense and not high speed corridors for cars only, all the matters listed under item 4 can and will be addressed. As an example the

In addition, as we promote these ideas (above) that encourage pedestrian friendly environments and more shared space for all modes of transport, we will also need clear policies to promote greener development. This will in turn reduce pressure on infrastructure and hydraulic networks and the amenity across the board will be improved as the priority moves to walking trips. Every new dwelling in Canberra that promotes walking trips takes huge pressure off the need to provide new infrastructure and will ultimately produce a more sustainable city.

6. Extension of redevelopment policy to other areas – under item 2

These policies, possibly to a lesser degree, should be extended to the frontages of the major cross streets such as Moat and Antill Street, MacArthur Avenue and Wakefield Avenue and frontages to Haig Park. The opportunity for higher density development in these areas reinforces the structure and legibility of the City, as well as the major movement and green corridors. I would also strongly support the continuation of GZ5 to the north of Antill Street on the Eastern side of Northbourne Avenue.

With the above recommendations, I have tried to establish a strategic context for considering the review of current policies for RZ4 in particular to allow a higher density, primarily for residential development in these areas.

The RZ4 sites between Wakefield Avenue and Antill Street are uniquely placed for a higher density residential development which promotes walk up type, low energy (green) residential buildings of three to four storeys. In particular the areas in Lyneham have access to vast areas of open space and trunk cycle routes to civic and the ANU. They are ideally located for a diverse range of housing opportunities for students, young professionals, families and older Canberrans who would benefit from such well located urban housing. To restrict these opportunities for any reason is to promote the expansion of Greenfields development which is totally inappropriate when our priority should be a more sustainable City of Canberra.

In relation to density I see no reason why the plot ratio in these areas should be less than 1:1 as a guide for development given that the parking provision should be minimised e.g. one car space per household to promote walking trips and public transport usage. This again would be consistent with medium density housing policy currently in place in Kingston with appropriate modifications in relation to restrictions on parking.

7. Northbourne Housing Heritage Precinct

I endorse the view of the heritage Council, which I understand promotes a visionary approach to the redevelopment of the current public housing site and integration with adjoining sites and public lands to achieve a new high quality built environment for the future.

The current density, lay out and nature of the housing development is inconsistent with current housing policies, standards, social planning policies and completely inappropriate in its present form.

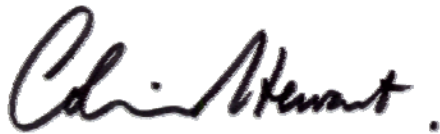
Conclusion

This review is extremely timely; it highlights the need for an integrated policy approach to achieve the objectives which I presume the committee has, for a more sustainable city. This more sustainable city would give genuine priority to a comfortable, safe and attractive pedestrian environment with a network that promotes walkability and walking trips.

The consistent application of these principles and policies, to not just a fragment of one of the Avenues, but to all of Canberra's Avenues and Boulevards is the appropriate way to move forward. The approach I am promoting to this hugely complex issue is one that requires a coordinated view of the ACT Government and the Commonwealth to set up a strategic framework that would allow all of these worthwhile planning ideas and principles to be implemented as a priority.

Thank you again for the opportunity to contribute my comments to this inquiry and again, I would be pleased to make a presentation to the Committee with a more detailed break down of the implementation of these broad principles.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Colin Stewart". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a period at the end.

Colin Stewart, Director